

Flounder Building  
Southeast Corner of Sharpshin &  
Market Square Alleys  
Alexandria, Virginia

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

*Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings*

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Washington, D. C.  
20242

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

## FLOUNDER BUILDING

Location: Southeast corner of Sharpshin and Market Square Alleys, next to the Alexandria City Hall, Alexandria, Virginia.

Present Owner: The City of Alexandria, Virginia

Present Use: Unused

Brief Statement of Significance: This Alexandria flounder building was built near 1800 and was doubled shortly after its construction with another "back-to-back" flounder building. This structure is sometimes reputed to have been Arell's Tavern and frequented by such Revolutionary dignitaries as George Washington.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Built in the late 18th or early 19th century this double flounder building had a long and varied career with a wide scope of uses. Scheduled for demolition by Urban Renewalists in the 1960's, the building became the object of public controversy as some Alexandria citizens attempted to prove that it was the famous Arell's Tavern, which was recorded in the expense books of George Washington as a place frequented by Revolutionary lawmakers. Proof was not sufficient at the time of this writing to save the building from planned demolition.

The two and a half story brick structure is actually two flounder buildings built back to back at close to the same time and then used together. These flounder buildings have a peculiar roof type which is similar to a steep shed roof with the high point of the roof flush with the lot line of a town property. In this case the two structures were built together forming one large gable or double flounder roof. This is an important local form of architecture.

The building was enlarged twice after the flounder was doubled and in the late 19th century the building was substantially altered, with the addition of iron reinforcing and the present corner entrance. There were several windows and doors on the street facades bricked up at the same time which changed the exterior appearance of the structure considerably.

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This property was owned by Richard Arell and it did contain a building in the last part of the 18th century. Arell's Tavern was in existence at the same time that Arell owned this property, and even though it may be the same building that housed the tavern, the plot of ground contained several other buildings, and Arell may have owned other property in the area, or rented it.

Insurance records (of June 1805, written by Thomas White) indicate that the property contained a two-story brick back dwelling valued at \$1,100. The property was owned by the White family until 1903. It was operated as an oyster bar from then until 1919 by a man named Zimmerman. The building was then used by Worth Hulfish and Sons Hardware dealers until the mid 1950's. The City of Alexandria acquired the building along with many others in the area in the 1960's, so that they might be razed in an effort at Urban Renewal.

Prepared by Donald B. Myer  
Architect  
National Park Service  
Washington, D. C.

References:

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Alexandria Historic Restoration and Preservation  
Commission files, Material compiled by Miss Corinne  
Reardon and Mrs. E. K. Van Swearingen

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PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

The flounder building at the southeast corner of Market Square Alley and Sharpshin Alley is best described as a two and a half story, brick and double flounder building. It is of residential scale and is located to the rear of some commercial structures and behind the City Hall of Alexandria, Virginia. It fronts directly on the alleys and has no yard or landscaping. The alleys are cobbled and most of the nearby buildings were of the same type originally. The entire block on which these structures were located is to be cleared for urban renewal and the area is to become a public mall with underground parking.

Built in the late 18th or early 19th century, this building was constructed in two main parts. Each of these was a separate flounder structure, built at different times, but contemporary to each other. That portion to the south was framed into the earlier part to the north. Thus the structure gives the impression of a utility gable roofed building. The building has two additions to the east that were added near 1900.

The facades on the alleys of the building are of a flemish bond brick construction with wooden two over two double hung windows, that are not original, and exterior blinds. The cornice line has a saw-tooth brick design. Window trim is soft sandstone. The structure is covered with a standing seam metal roof which is not original.

During remodeling, ca. 1900, two corner windows were blocked and a corner door was installed at 45 degrees, facing the intersection of the two alleys. This is framed in iron. At the same time a pair of doors, which opened onto Market Square Alley, were converted to windows. These doors were several bays apart, a pattern that was not uncommon for taverns ca. 1800. A small round window was also added and faced into a small closet on the first floor. An outside basement door and basement windows were blocked. Only one chimney protrudes through the roof, this one on the south flounder building is the only one of three remaining.

The interior of the building is in a bad state of repair and reflects many changes from many different uses. Much of the interior was decorated in the early 1900's, removing most of the original features. Only a portion of the south half of the structure retains that which may be original first floor trim. This area in the front of this

half retains a simple fireplace and chair rail, done with conventional moldings. The interior doors are a variety of later additions. The second floor of the south flounder building also has some of its original trim, consisting of the chair rails and some four panel doors. These doors show the marks of long gone H-L hinges. The wall and ceiling finish in the entire building was plaster. There is evidence that the first floor of the south building was painted, over the beams, etc., before the ceiling plaster was installed. Near 1900 the north half of the building was finished on the first floor with an ornamental tin ceiling, which has been allowed to fall into shabby condition.

The buildings each had basements, but the stairways were blocked and they were completely closed off at some time in the building history.

The first floor, consists basically of one room for each section of the structure. The original stair of the north flounder building was removed, but surface evidence locates this stair in the center of the building, which undoubtedly cut the building into more than one room on the first floor. The south building has a side stair and a front and rear room. These seem to be original in location.

The second floors of the flounder building differ greatly. The south flounder building has a small rear room and a large front room, which was equipped with a fireplace and side cabinet. The second floor of the north section shows signs of having been cut into several rooms, the partitions were removed. The east addition to the flounder buildings contains one room to a floor.

The third floor of the north building was a semifinished affair with no partitions. The third floor of the south building has a front and rear room. The headroom in both cases is quite limited, due to the sloping roofs. The third floor of the south building shows how the south building was framed into the north building, and therefore built later. There is also a good example of hand cut lath and wrought nails here. Some burned timbers also appear here.

All fireplaces have been removed from the north building except one in the basement. This part of the structure seems to have been heated by stoves during its last uses. The north building has two fireplaces on the first floor and one in the front room of the second. The later additions were heated by stoves. The building at one time was plumbed and has some crude turn-of-the-century bathroom fixtures on the second floor of the north flounder. The building was also wired, but none of the mechanical equipment was operative at the time of this inspection.